

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, November 14, 1900, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Shreagh, C. B.
Wednesday, November 14, 1900. My darling Mabel:

I reached here last night thoroughly tired out — but just in time to catch Dr. Phelps and go over his sheep records. He leaves tomorrow. For the first time I have records that can be relied on — and I believe valuable and important results will be obtained. The feeding and starving experiments have been satisfactory. The fed sheep have gone up steadily in weight at the critical time — and the half-starved sheep have come down (with a vengeance) during the same time. We shall certainly have a decisive answer to the question as to whether a progressive change in nutrition immediately after mating has an influence upon the sex of the offspring — and (as we suspect) whether improving condition after mating is favorable to the production of female offspring, and loss of weight at that time conducive to the production of males. The doctor has also made a series of temperature observations which will surely be of value. The temperature of a ewe rises at the time of mating — and during the three days when mating is possible — the temperature of the fed sheep rose still higher on the 2nd day falling on the third — whereas the temperature of the starved sheep fell on the 2nd day and rose again on the third. This was not only true of the flocks (fed and starved) as wholes — but was also true of each individual ewe in each flock — seeming to indicate that the temperature change is significant — and that it is really due to the changed condition of nutrition.

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The feeding and starving experiments have only been continued for one fortnight after mating — as it is believed that the sex of the unborn lamb is determined within that time so that no variations in nutrition after that time could change the sex. After one fortnight there

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fore the owes are turned out to pasture and left to forage for themselves. We must wait until March and April to know results.

I am very much pleased with the thoroughness of the experiments conducted by Dr. Phelps — and the scientific way he has gone to work. He has lived in the gardener's cottage — boarding at Mr. McInnis' — and he has devoted his whole time to the observations and to his notes — not going over to the other side of the Bay at all. Incidentally he has profited personally in health. He was in very poor physical condition when he came on the 1st of October — but has gained 16 pounds in weight during the six weeks he has been here. If we find reason to believe next spring that we have discovered the key to sex — I am inclined to think it would be well to delay publication for another year so as to place the matter beyond dispute by a wholesale experiment. We could either purchase (or borrow from the farmers) at least 200 ewes (100 to produce male offspring and 100 to produce female) — and keep them on Beinn Shreagh during October and November — returning them to the farmers to winter. Then in the spring collect statistics concerning 3 the lambs. A wholesale experiment should I think be made before committing ourselves to the statement that sex can be controlled by feeding.

Mr. Kennan is to have a gentleman's dinner party on Thursday to celebrate the safe return of Mr. Atwater from the Transvaal War.

I landed in Boston on Thursday (8th inst.) about noon — after a good passage. Rather rough for some of the passengers but I enjoyed it. I found Mrs. Pratt waiting for me at the Parker House — with a wonderful collection of material for Chapter VI, appendices and etc. Result: — I did not leave my room at the Parker until Sunday — working hard all the time. Much pleased with the result. Chapter VI of the Historical notes is undoubtedly the best and most important chapter I have written. Mailed it to Booth on Sunday with special delivery stamp, and started same evening by train for Baddeck.

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Arrived last night — done out! Have devoted all my time since to Dr. Phelps and his records — and retired to bed at eight o'clock this evening with a headache. Have just wakened up (1 A.M.) Thursday — to write a few lines to you so that Dr. Phelps may take this letter to the Grand Narrows and mail it on the train in the morning.

I hope you received my cablegram from Boston 4 announcing my arrival. I waited until I heard from Washington before cabling. By the by our bank account in Boston is overdrawn. If you need more money than you have cable me so that I can make arrangements to borrow. We must be careful now about expenditures. I will be as economical as possible. I think you better be careful too.

I have been quite troubled at not hearing by cable from you. Feared your mother might be ill again. Held my soul in patience however, until arrived in Baddeck — feeling that it would be time enough to be alarmed — if no cablegram awaited me here. Glad to find your cablegram of Sunday — although you do not say how you all are — simply that you are in apartments in Paris.

Lina is here — leaves for New York on Monday.

Angus Buchannan has left Baddeck for Boston on route for Colorado or Arizona. I had a note from him in Washington before I sailed with Bert, and sent him a cheque for \$100.00 from you and me. Dr. Phelps informs me that he made an examination of Angus's lunge, and found undoubted proof of tuberculosis. In fact one lung is more than half gone. He fears that the proposed change of climate will come too late.

I am still headachy — so will go off to bed again and leave this for Dr. Phelps.

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Love to my dear little Daidums — Gertrude — Helen — your mamma and lots for yourself.

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Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. A. Graham Bell, % Monroe and Company, Paris, France.